



Key Findings from Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2024/2025

Summary and Analysis



This summary is based on [*Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2024/2025*](#) and previous editions from 1992 to 2023.

Aimed at a wide audience of child care data and information users from policy makers to parents, its purpose is to contribute to understanding the state of Canadian early learning and child care at the end of 2025.

ECEC in Canada 2024/2025 is the Childcare Resource and Research Unit's [15th Canada-wide report](#) on early childhood education and care. Detailed sections on each province and territory include key statistics and outline the many recent policy and program changes. It describes federal and Indigenous early childhood programs, and includes 29 comparative tables providing Canada-wide and longitudinal perspectives. For a detailed overview of Canadian child care policy and provision though 2019, see the "State of Canadian Early Childhood Education and Care in 2022" section of [*Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2021*](#).

All [*ECEC in Canada publications*](#) are available free of charge for download on the [CRRU website](#).

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Canada-wide developments

At the end of 2025, the first phase of building a universal child care system has ended and a second phase is beginning. Substantial system-building has been accomplished thus far, but more time, resources, and collaboration are needed to accomplish the bold goals set out.

Canada's first sustained effort to build a universal early learning and child care (ELCC) system was set in motion by the April 2021 federal budget. The Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care plan (CWEELCC or \$10 a day child care) set an ambitious goal for Canada: development, over time, of a fully universal, affordable, high-quality, and inclusive ELCC system for all 0 – 5 year olds. The commitment was especially significant because Canada's child care status quo had always been acknowledged to be unacceptably undeveloped, earning Canada the bottom place in [international rankings](#) of peer economically advanced countries.

The 2021 federal budget included key commitments, some time-specific, aimed at moving Canada away from its status quo reliance on a child care market toward a new ELCC vision – a more public system designed to meet the needs of children and families, promote women's economic security, and support a 21st century economy.

The Department of Finance's [Budget Backgrounder](#) said: "Combined with previous investments announced since 2015, a minimum of \$9.2 billion per year ongoing will be invested in child care, including Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care, starting in 2025–26, with a future objective of reaching a 50/50 cost share with provinces and territories."

When then-federal Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland [introduced the \\$10 a day plan in 2021](#), she underscored that "[w]e are building something that, of necessity, must be constructed collaboratively, and for the long-term."

Figure 1: CWELCC's key commitments to building an ELCC system.

CWELCC's key commitments

- ★ Building a system of affordable, high-quality, inclusive early learning and child care for all families and children
- ★ Making child care affordable by reducing parent fees to \$10 a day (average) for 0 – 5 year olds by 2026
- ★ Expanding primarily public and non-profit child care by 250,000 licensed spaces by 2026 to ultimately provide quality child care for all
- ★ Addressing early childhood educators' low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of recognition that have historically affected the 95%+ female child care workforce
- ★ Making meaningful progress in before- and after-school child care
- ★ Building a strong baseline of publicly available data to ensure accountability, measure progress, report to Canadians, and improve the system
- ★ Addressing the early learning and child care needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities as a critical element of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

CWELCC'S FOUNDATIONS

[Canadian federalism](#) defines social programs such as child care as a provincial responsibility. Thus, implementation by provinces and territories is key to developing a Canada-wide ELCC system. A main catalyst for CWELCC's initiation in 2021 was the COVID-19 pandemic's corroboration that universal child care is a fundamental pillar of the economy.

CWELCC's first phase (2021 – 2026) was operationalized through the first five-year [bilateral agreements and action plans](#) between Ottawa and each jurisdiction¹, which laid the foundation for system-building. These built on the [Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework \(2017\)](#) and [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework \(2018\)](#). Substantial federal funding has supported numerous provincial/territorial initiatives addressing reduction of parent fees, expansion of supply, and workforce issues.

Although provinces and territories determined their own approaches, their initiatives were shaped by several high-level agreed-upon policy elements, including a supply-side-funded and universal approach, recognition of the critical role of the child care workforce, and expansion of services primarily through public and non-profit provision.

Bill C-35, [An Act Respecting Early Learning and Child Care](#) is Canada's first federal child care legislation to become law. It received royal assent on March 19, 2024. [Bill C-35 establishes](#) "a permanent, legislated commitment to federal funding for early learning and child care" and reiterates affordability, accessibility, quality, and inclusivity as touchstones of ELCC. It states a federal government commitment to establishing and maintaining a system in which "all children in Canada"

¹ Quebec's ELCC agreements with Canada are "asymmetrical"; Quebec receives federal funds but is solely responsible for determining its own child care program.

have access to high-quality, affordable, inclusive child care programs, “in particular those that are provided by public and not-for-profit child care providers.” The Act incorporates a rights-based approach, referencing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and Canada’s international human rights obligations, including those associated with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

With the first five-year bilateral agreements scheduled to end March 31, 2026, CWELCC enters a second phase. In March 2025, then-Prime Minister Justin Trudeau offered all provinces and territories the opportunity to extend their existing agreements for five years, through 2031. Ten jurisdictions immediately accepted the offer, while Alberta², Ontario, and Saskatchewan all reached agreements with the federal government in late 2025.

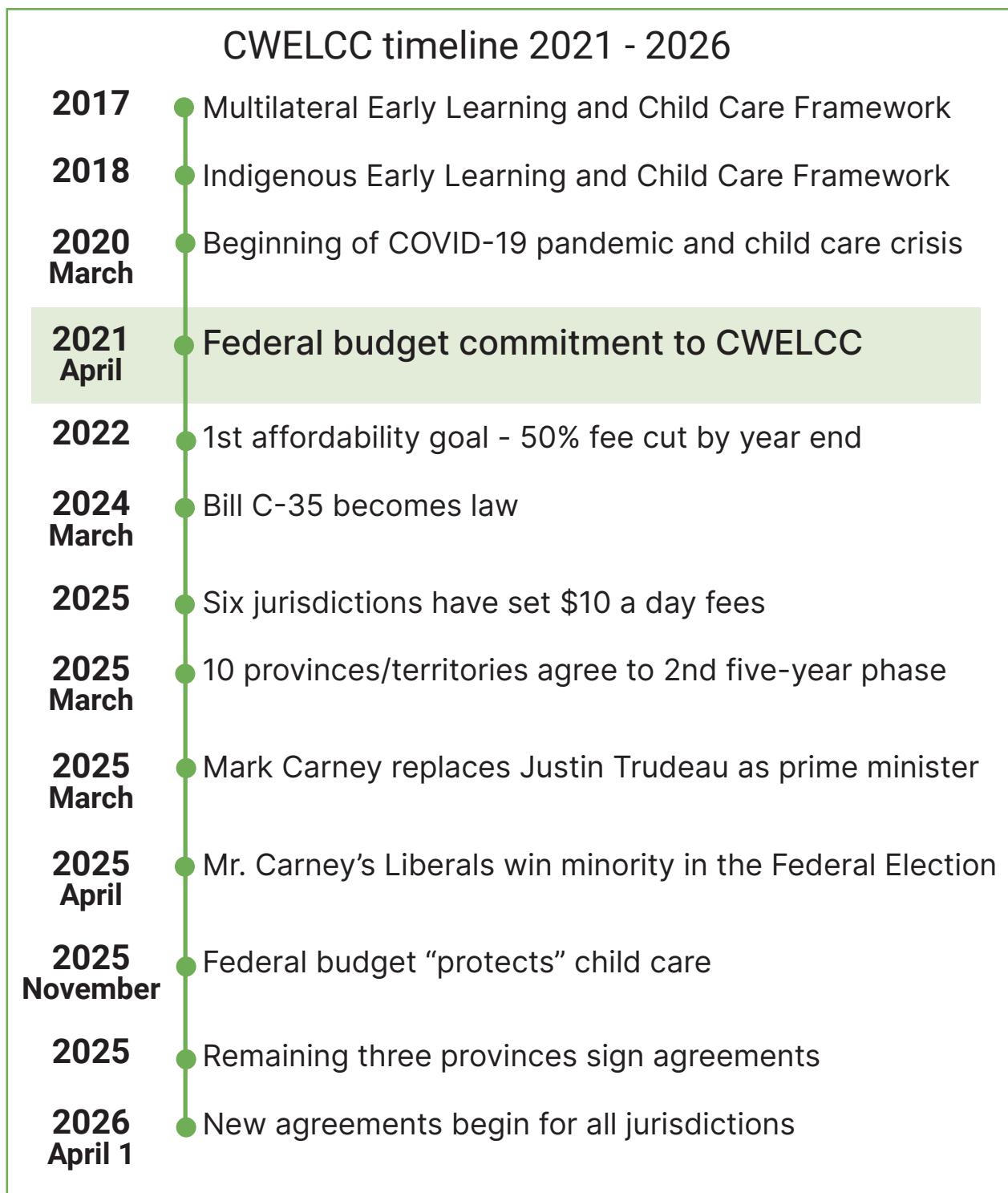
Mark Carney replaced Justin Trudeau as Liberal Party leader and prime minister in March 2025, as Canada entered a period of economic and political uncertainty driven by a new relationship with the United States. In the April federal election, Mr. Carney won another Liberal minority government. His [election platform](#) promised to protect, continue, and strengthen the \$10 a day program, noting that “in just a few short years, this program has become a core part of Canada’s social infrastructure.”

In November 2025, Parliament approved the first Carney budget, which stated the federal government would protect child care by continuing the existing ELCC funding and adding

² Ontario and Alberta reached new one-year agreements with the federal government, rather than the five-year agreements that other jurisdictions including Saskatchewan reached.

a 3% escalator to offset inflation but did not contain additional funding to grow or strengthen the program. At the end of 2025, the federal government is negotiating new action plans with provinces/territories.

Figure 2: CWELCC timeline 2021 - 2026.



Parent fees and affordability

CWELCC's most important accomplishment to date has been to shift child care from being funded mostly by parent fees to being mostly publicly funded. This means that parent fees have been markedly reduced, although there are still some significant gaps in affordability.

PARENT FEES

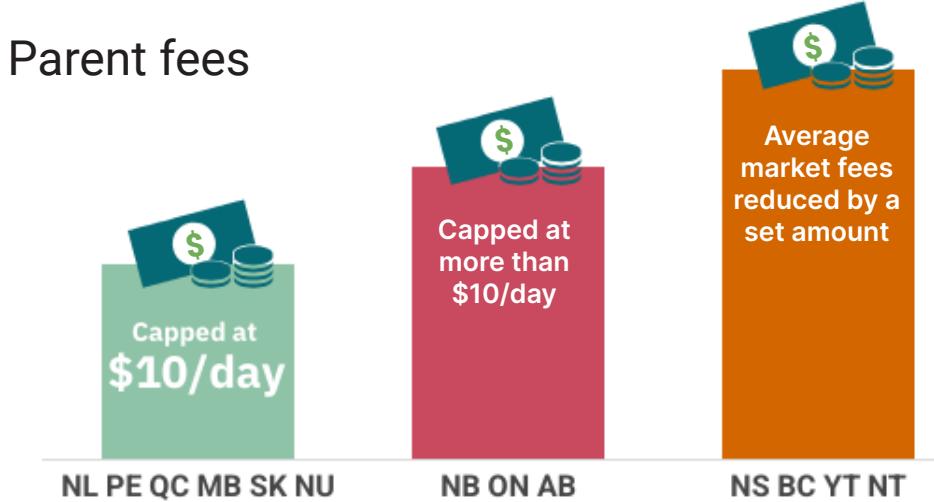
Affordability was CWELCC's first commitment. It has been achieved incrementally, aimed at an average fee of \$10 a day by 2026.

- Six^{3 4} provinces/territories (Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nunavut) now all use set (capped) \$10 a day fees or less.
- Three (New Brunswick, Ontario, Alberta) have also introduced set fees, but at more than \$10 a day. New Brunswick varies its set fees by region and age of child; the others set one fee jurisdiction-wide.
- Four provinces/territories (Nova Scotia, British Columbia [for a majority of its child care], the Yukon, and Northwest Territories) reduced their market fees by specified set amounts.

³ British Columbia also sets a \$10 a day fee for a (growing) minority of its centres and licensed family child care.

⁴ In addition to the six provinces/territories that now set fees at \$10 a day, market fees in the Yukon and Northwest Territories were an average of \$10 a day in 2023, but then rose above \$10 a day.

Figure 3: Parent fees for full-day child care (2025).



FEE SUBSIDIES FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Since child care was included in the federal Canada Assistance Plan, which was introduced in the 1960s and ended in 1995,⁵ Canadian provinces/territories have used social welfare-oriented fee subsidy schemes to cover all or part of fees for eligible low-income families in licensed child care. Before CWELCC, all provinces/territories except Quebec⁶ and the Northwest Territories used relatively similar fee subsidy schemes. More universal supply-side funding was relatively limited, with parent fees being the primary source of operating revenue for ELCC programs in almost all provinces. In 2025:

- All jurisdictions except Quebec, Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Northwest Territories continue to use these fee subsidy systems with little change.

⁵ The Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), originally introduced by the federal government in 1966, was Canada's national welfare program. Its child care provisions allowed fees for eligible families to be covered through 50/50 cost-sharing with provinces as an aspect of social assistance or prevention. The federal government ended CAP and its child care provisions in 1995, but most provinces and territories continue to use individual fee subsidies modelled on CAP's provisions.

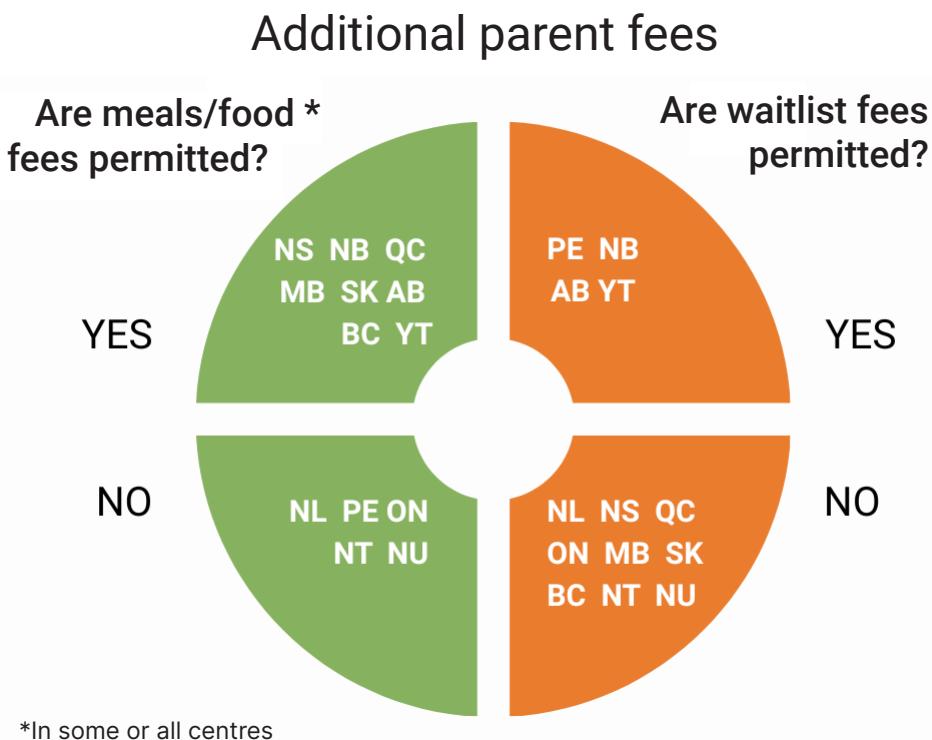
⁶ Quebec also used individual parent fee subsidies until it shifted to providing operational funding in 1997.

- As parent fees have dropped overall, the number of fee-subsidized children has decreased in most jurisdictions.
- Saskatchewan and Alberta discontinued their fee subsidy systems in 2024.⁷

ADDITIONAL FEES

As CWELCC has been implemented, parent fees for child care have become more publicly managed. In all jurisdictions, provincial/territorial governments control most parent fees in one way or another, with most using set or capped fees. This has highlighted that in some jurisdictions, operators may charge additional fees for specified program elements.

Figure 4: Selected additional fees in full-day child care centres (2025).



⁷ In Quebec, four categories of families are not required to pay fees. In Saskatchewan, an employment fund may now be used by eligible low-income families to contribute to child care fees. Alberta does not have specific arrangements for low-income families with 0- 5 year olds but retains subsidies for kindergarten and school-age. The Northwest Territories provides some funds for low-income families through the Income Assistance Program.

Some provinces/territories permit operators to charge parents additional fees for program elements that other jurisdictions treat as part of base or core services (e.g., meals, waitlists, extended hours, field trips), while other jurisdictions disallow this practice. For example, the Northwest Territories' [Early Learning and Child Care Act](#) states, "An operator shall not charge any amounts to parents of children attending the early learning and child care facility other than child care fees" (29. [1]) and defines child care fees as "all fees charged for the care, instruction, or supervision of a child, including for the provision of any food, beverages, entertainment, or other things set out in the regulations."



Availability and expansion

The number of centres and number of regulated family child care homes have both increased considerably since CWELCC's initiation, as has the number of regulated child care spaces. Nevertheless, building a more adequate and more equitably distributed supply of child care provision still has a distance to go.

NUMBER OF CENTRES AND REGULATED FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES

As of March 2024, there were 18,378 licensed centres for children aged 0 – 12 years across Canada, an increase of 1,319 from the 17,059 centres in 2021. In 2019, CWELCC's baseline year, there were 17,542 centres; as the data show, the number of centres modestly decreased (by 483) at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

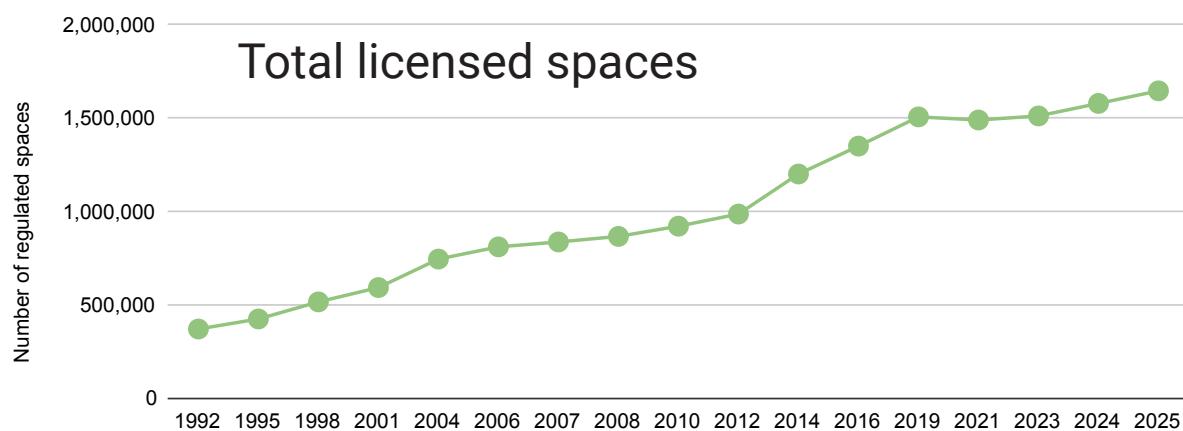
Regulated family child care has also increased under CWELCC. The number of active family child care homes Canada-wide, which had been steadily decreasing since 2014, began to grow again after 2021. In 2019, CWELCC's baseline year, there were 21,513 active regulated family child care homes reported. After a substantial drop to 17,840 during the pandemic, the family child care sector grew to 22,108 active homes in 2024.

NUMBER OF SPACES

The total licensed capacity for 0 – 12 year olds in centres and family child care is the overall total of all licensed child care

spaces of all types. As the figure below shows, total spaces for 0 – 12 year olds have increased from 371,573 in 1992 (when CRRU began tracking child care spaces) to 1,646,086 in 2025. The total supply of child care has grown more than four-fold, by 255,884 regulated spaces from 2019 to 2025, with a drop in licensed space capacity in the main COVID-19 period of 2019 – 2021.

Figure 5: Total licensed spaces for children 0 – 12 years Canada-wide (1992 – 2025).



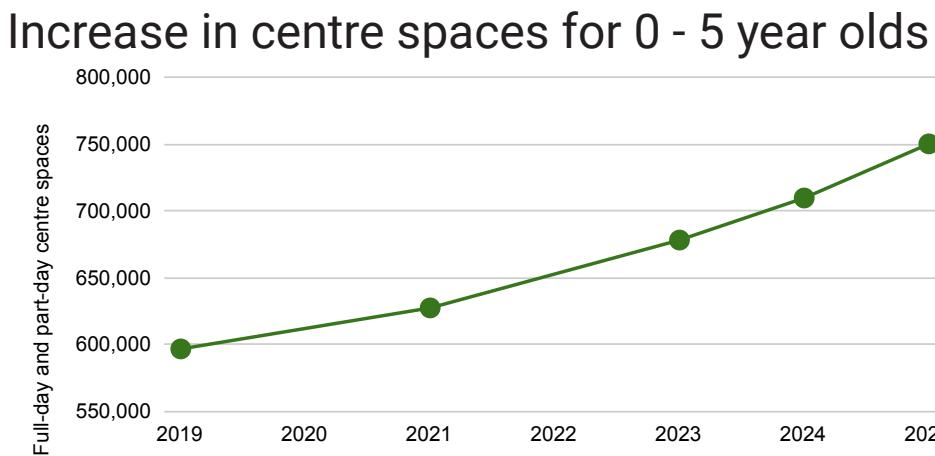
Note The total number of spaces includes full-day centres, part-day preschools, before- and after-school child care, and family child care.

SPACES IN FULL-DAY CENTRES AND PART-DAY PRESCHOOLS FOR 0 – 5 YEAR OLDS

CWECC's focus is on child care for 0 – 5 year olds (up to their sixth birthday, with some flexibility). However, data on the number of spaces for 0 – 5 year olds in before- and after-school programs or family child care is not consistently available across provinces/territories. The data in Figure 6 shows full-day and part-day centre spaces for 0 - 5 year olds grew from 596,612 in 2019 to 750,230 in 2025. This, however, underrepresents spaces for 0 – 5 year olds – substantially so, in some jurisdictions. For example, Ontario reports an additional 127,942 licensed spaces for four- and five-year-olds

(kindergarten-age) in part-day before- and after-school child care programs, most of which are covered by CWELCC.

Figure 6: Full-day and part-day centre spaces for children 0 – 5 years Canada-wide (2019 – 2025).



Note These numbers do not include four- and five-year-olds in before- and after-school child care.

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE PROVISION PATTERNS

Due to different provincial/territorial patterns of child care use and gaps in data, calculating child care provision (licensed capacity) for 0 – 5 year olds is not straightforward. Canada-wide, 0 – 5 year olds in regulated part- or full-day child care may be in:

- Full-day centres;
- Part-day centres (preschools/nursery schools);
- Family child care; or
- Before- and after-school child care.

KINDERGARTEN PROVISION

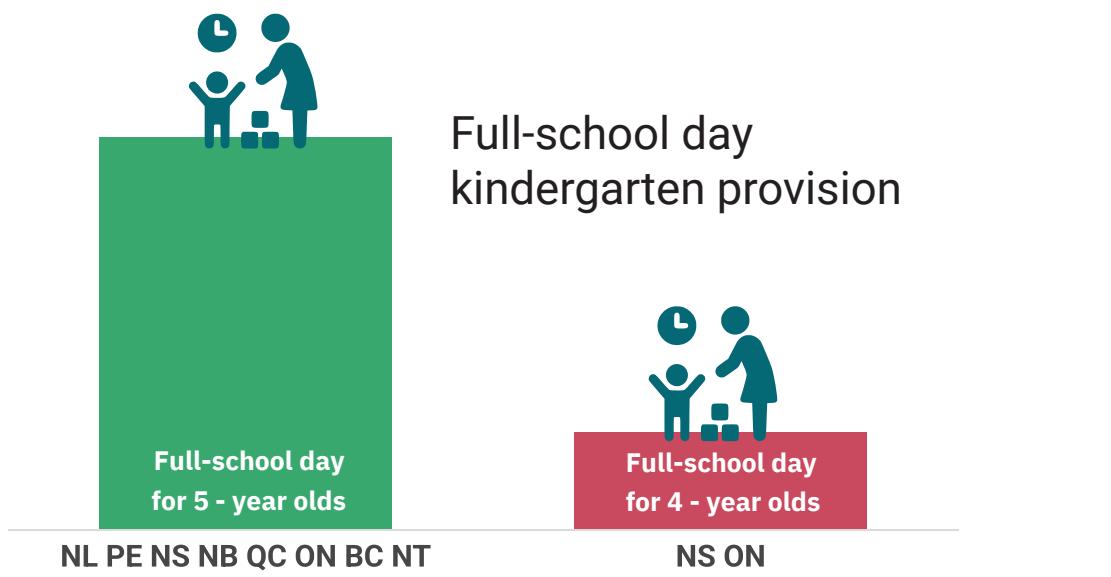
In addition to regulated child care, all provinces/territories provide kindergarten for all five-year-olds and some or all four-year-olds. Kindergarten, which is usually part of the

public education system, serves as the main child care arrangement, as well as an early childhood education program for many families⁸.

In the last two decades, full school-day kindergarten for five-year-olds has become the norm Canada-wide; it is provided by eight provinces/territories, with the Yukon providing full school-day kindergarten for some five-year-olds. The remaining jurisdictions offer part-day kindergarten for five-year-olds.

Kindergarten (or prekindergarten) for four-year-olds remains less widespread: It is provided for the full school-day for all children in Nova Scotia and Ontario, while eight other jurisdictions are phasing it in, offering it as a targeted program, or providing it as a part-day program. Saskatchewan includes three-year-olds in its targeted prekindergarten program.

Figure 7: Full-school day kindergarten provision in provinces/territories (2025).



⁸ In Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island, prekindergarten programs are provided as part of the regulated child care system. In other provinces, private or independent schools, which are publicly funded in some provinces, may also provide kindergarten or prekindergarten.

Distribution and equity

A total number – whether it is total licensed spaces or total number of children participating in licensed child care Canada-wide – has a number of limitations for understanding how and whether child care needs are fulfilled. Child care must fit the child's age and needs, and fit parents' location, commute to work, employment schedule, culture, and preferences.

Child care is less available in rural and remote areas and for children with disabilities, infants and toddlers, language minority groups, Indigenous families, non-standard hours workers, newcomers to Canada, low-income families, and others. Data to address all these equity issues comprehensively has only just begun to be available.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' 2023 research shows that close to half of Canada's children younger than kindergarten-age live in "child care deserts."

For example, [location data from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in 2023 shows](#) that close to half of Canada's children younger than kindergarten-age live in a "child care desert," defined as a postal code in which more

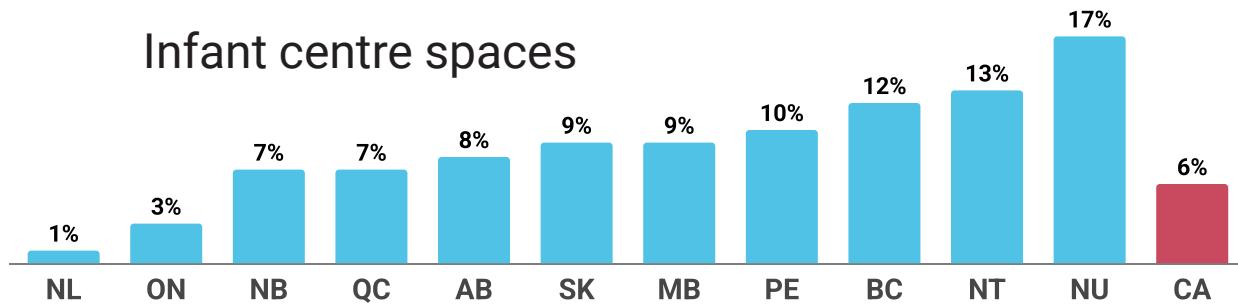
than three children compete for a single preschool-age child care space.

In 2023, the percent of children living in a child care desert ranged from a low of 4% (Prince Edward Island) to a high of 92% (Saskatchewan).

ECEC in Canada 2024/2025 data for the number of centre spaces for infants – the most underserved age group – illustrates this clearly. As Figure 8 shows, centre spaces for infants⁹ represent a small fraction of centre spaces for 0 – 12 year olds in 2025: Infant spaces ranged from 1% to 17% of all centre spaces across provinces/territories and represent only 6% of all centre spaces Canada-wide.

In 2025, there were only 200,497 infant and toddler spaces combined Canada-wide, up 14,462 spaces from 186,035 spaces a year earlier.

Figure 8: Infant spaces as a percent of all spaces 0 - 12 years (2025).



Note Nova Scotia and the Yukon data are not available.
BC uses a 0 -3 years category, half of which is represented here.

⁹ The definitions of an “infant” space vary somewhat by jurisdiction but are usually up to 18 months or two years.

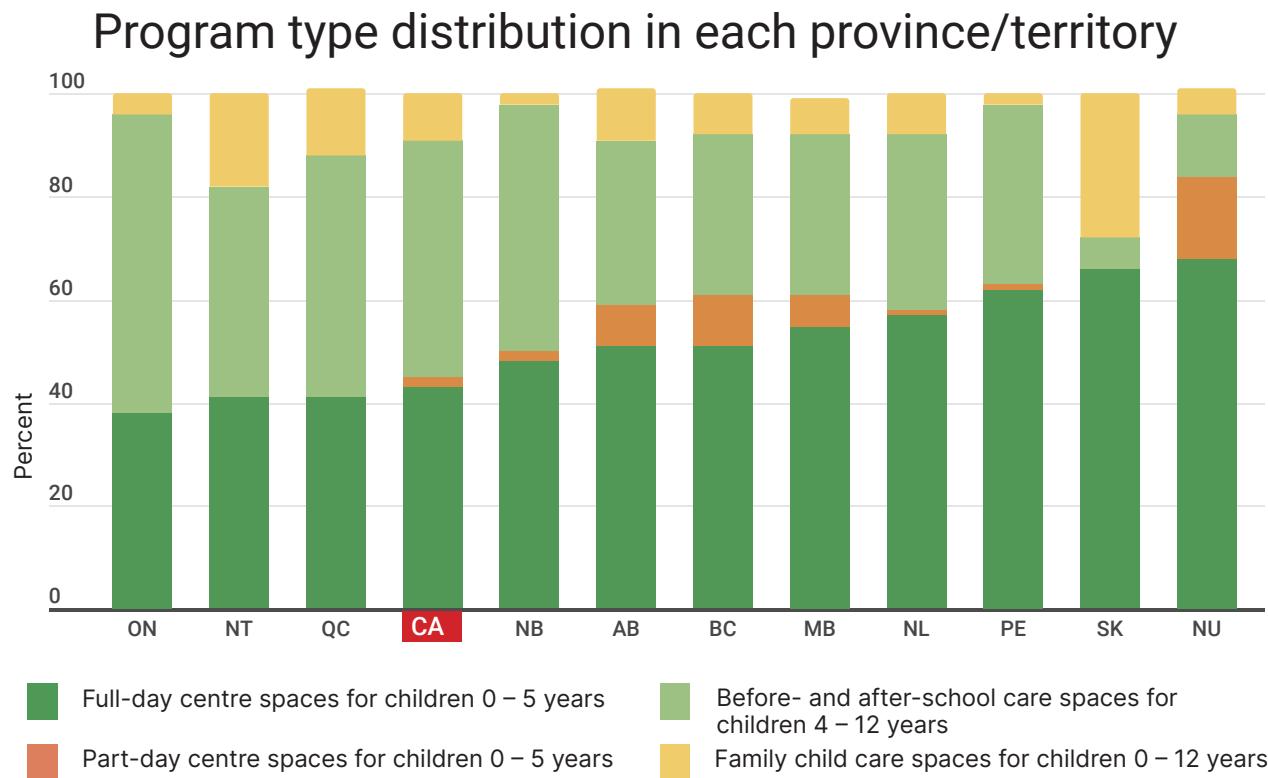
DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE TYPES

Regulated child care in all provinces and territories falls into several categories:

- Full-day centres for 0 – 5 year olds;
- Part-day centres or preschools/nursery schools for 0 – 5 year olds;
- Before- and after-school child care in centres for 4 – 12 year olds; and
- Family child care for 0 – 12 year olds.

The composition of the regulated child care landscape that provides options for parents in 2025 varies considerably by province/territory, as Figure 9 shows.

Figure 9: Percent distribution of child care by program type (2025).



Note Of total spaces for 0- 12 year olds in The Yukon (100%), family child care spaces account for 6%, while the remaining 94% includes full-day and part-day centre spaces, and before- and after-school care, not broken down by type.

Where totals are less than 1% or not available, the data are not shown.

Ownership of child care services

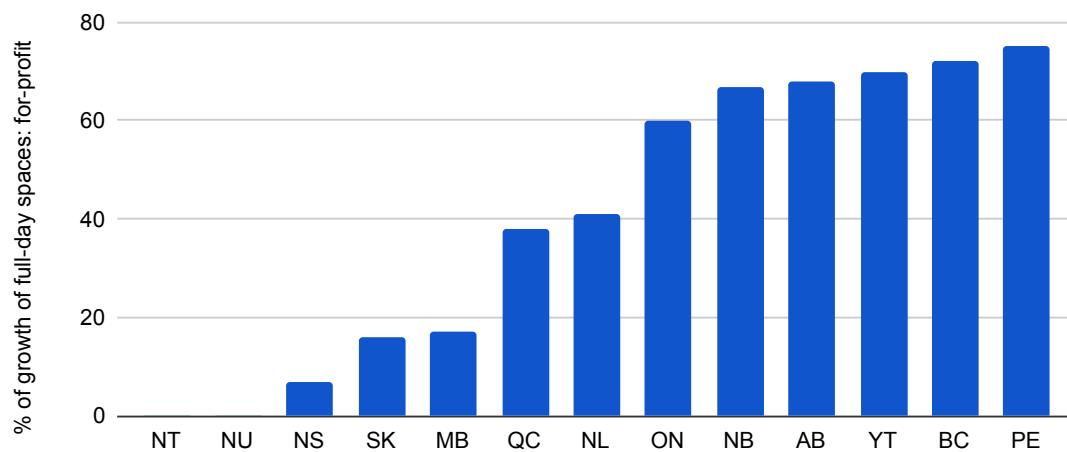
The 2021 federal budget stated that CWELCC expansion would be primarily not-for-profit. This was reinforced in the first federal/provincial agreements and action plans, and in the federal ELCC legislation, Bill C-35. Nevertheless, for-profit spaces have accounted for the bulk of expansion under CWELCC.

The initial CWELCC announcement in the 2021 federal budget stated that CWELCC expansion would be primarily not-for-profit. This federal condition was also featured in the [first agreements and action plans](#): All jurisdictions committed to expansion that would be entirely or primarily not-for-profit. However, this commitment, which was reiterated in the federal legislation, was not achieved.

Child care ownership – public, private non-profit, and private for-profit – has long been a key child care issue in Canada. Considerable [evidence about child care ownership](#) or auspice from Canada and abroad, shows that child care ownership is directly linked to quality, equity, parent fees, staff wages and working conditions, and effective use of public funds, with [for-profit ownership](#) showing higher parent fees, lower staff wages, and poorer quality, working conditions, and ECE training in Canadian and international research.

ECEC in Canada's data show that for-profit spaces have accounted for the bulk of expansion since CWELCC's inception. Figure 10 shows that for-profit expansion

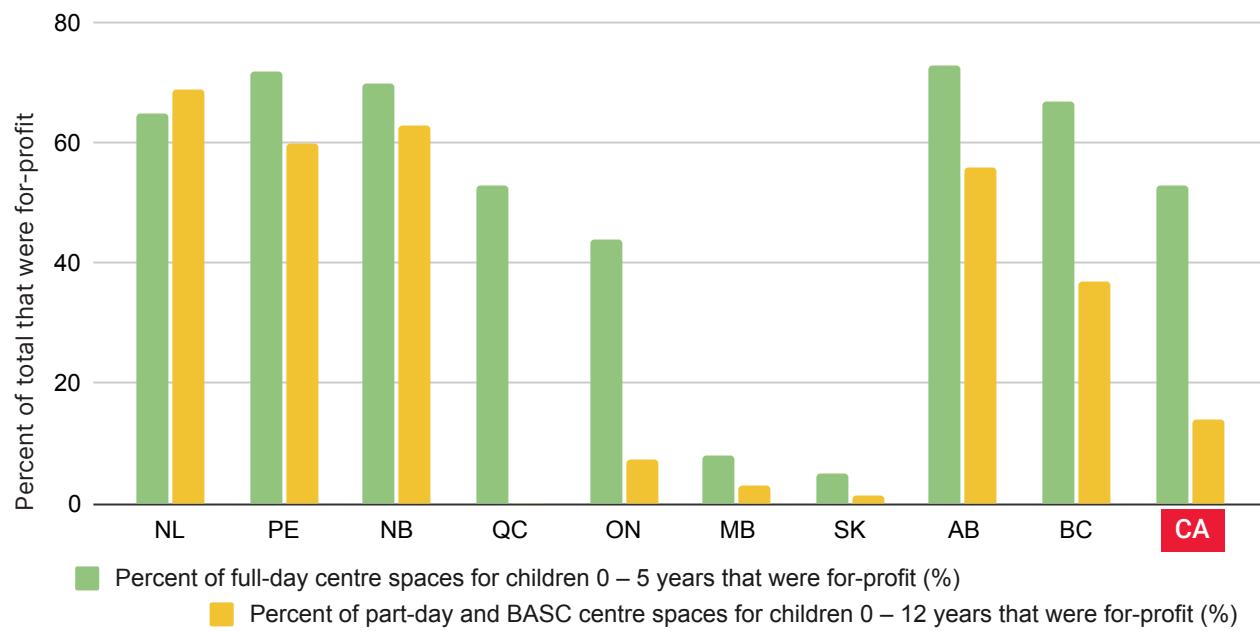
Figure 10: Percent of expansion of full-day spaces for children 0 – 5 years that was for-profit.



represented between 0% and 75% of full-day centre expansion by province/territory between 2019 to 2025; for-profit growth represented more than 40% of growth of full-day spaces in seven jurisdictions. The proportion of full-day centre spaces that were for-profit ranged from 0% to 73% by jurisdiction in 2025; in eight of the 12 jurisdictions for which data was available, 40% of more of full-day centre spaces were for-profit.

The data also show that ownership types are not evenly distributed across child care program types. Full-day child care in centres is more likely (sometimes much more likely) to be operated on a for-profit basis than part-day preschools and part-day before- and after-school programs, as Figure 11 shows.

Figure 11: Proportion of full- and part-day centre-based child care that was for-profit (2025).



Note In this figure, part-day centre-based child care includes part-day preschools and part-day before- and after-school child care.

Where totals are less than 1% or not available, the data are not shown.



The child care workforce

Canadian child care workers' low pay, poor working conditions, lack of recognition, and less-than-adequate qualification requirements have been [well-documented since the 1990s](#). Although the issues have been documented, and numerous initiatives have attempted to address them, child care workforce issues have not been solved.

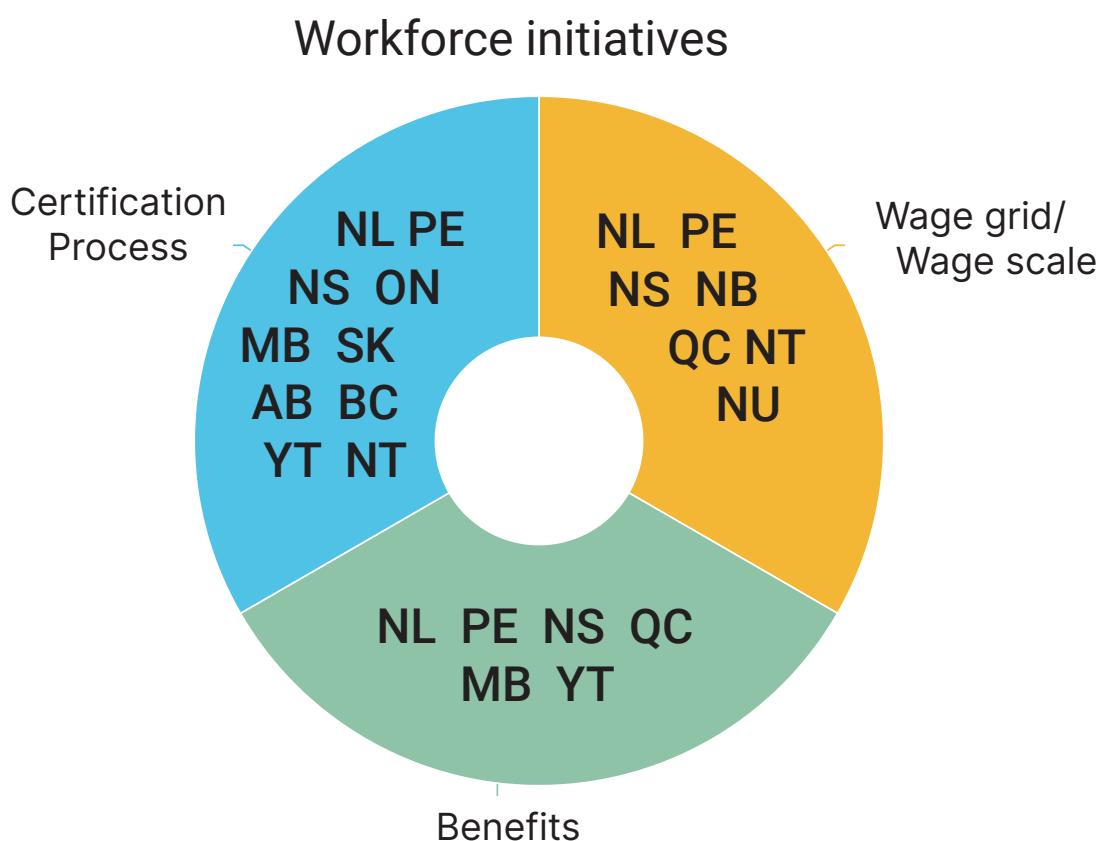
Expansion of high-quality child care Canada-wide depends heavily on employment of a qualified child care workforce – “qualified” in the sense that they have post-secondary training in early childhood education. Research summarized by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) confirms that [initial education for child care work](#) is a key indicator linked to other policy levers and quality. There is also good evidence that wages and working conditions are closely linked to [quality](#), recruitment, and [retention](#) of a qualified child care workforce.

The [initial CWELCC announcement in 2021](#) identified the child care workforce as central to the child care plan: “[W]ith provincial and territorial partners, the government will work to ensure that early childhood educators are at the heart of the system.” During the COVID-19 pandemic, many child care staff were laid off. As the pandemic abated, centres across Canada were unable to hire sufficient numbers of qualified staff.

This situation continues to persist as CWELCC enters its second phase.

A variety of child care workforce initiatives have been taken or are underway as all provinces/territories have committed to addressing child care workforce issues in their first action plans. As the data in *ECEC in Canada 2024/2025* show, seven jurisdictions now have wage grids or wage scales,¹⁰ with others utilizing combinations of wage enhancement, wage floors, and wage targets. Six provinces/territories have introduced support for benefits ranging from defined pension plans to contributions to employee benefits. Professional

Figure 12: Canadian child care workforce initiatives (2025).



¹⁰ The definition of a wage grid or scale used in *ECEC in Canada 2024/2025* is “a stepped scale outlining progressive salary levels based on factors including position, credentials, and experience/length of employment.” (See the Glossary.)

certification systems are used in 10 of the 13 jurisdictions; nine include every staff person working in a child care centre, although limited requirements for staff at entry level are the norm. As well, four jurisdictions require family child care providers to be certified through their certification process, albeit at entry level.

Nevertheless, provincial/territorial initiatives addressing the identified issues still tend to be piecemeal and regionalized, rather than comprehensive. Consistent comprehensive data on child care staff wages and working conditions over time are not available.¹¹ However, Statistics Canada's new Canadian Child Care Workers Survey is scheduled to be in the field in the spring of 2026, with a target of late 2027 for release of the data.



¹¹ Statistics Canada's recently published cross-Canada data on estimates of staff wages covers the 2021 - 2022 period. See [Child care centre workers serving children aged 0 to 5 years in Canada, 2021 to 2022](#) (Table 3). Data from the more recent versions of this survey are not yet available.

Public funding for regulated child care

Federal, provincial, and territorial dollars spent on regulated child care totalled almost \$12.5 billion in 2023 – 2024, up from \$5.8 billion in 2018 – 2019. Of the \$12.5 billion, \$6.2 billion were federal funds.

The 2021 [federal budget backgrounder](#) stated that a minimum of \$9.2 billion/year ongoing would be invested in child care, including Indigenous ELCC, starting in 2025-26, with a future objective of a 50/50 cost share with provinces and territories.

Figure 13: Public spending for regulated child care (2023 – 2024 fiscal year).

	Total spending for regulated child care, federal and provincial/territorial (\$ millions)	Total federal transfers (\$ millions)
NL	115	74
PE	65	30.5
NS	191	150
NB	224	122
QC	4,391	1,371
ON	4,121	2,311
MB	344	266
SK	239	230
AB	1,152	831
BC	1,578	748
YT	32.4	13.3
NT	14.1	14.6
NU	15.3	18.2

Note Federal transfers include CWELCC, Multilateral Framework Agreement funding, and the ELCC Infrastructure Fund, which may be used broadly, e.g. to fund ECE training. Regulated child care spending includes subsidies, operating funds, and one-time-only funds. Carry-forward of federal transfer funds was not taken into account in this figure.

Where does this leave Canada?

At the end of 2025, the Canada-wide child care system is entering a second phase. The commitment to protect, continue, and strengthen the program has been made. As the data and information collected in 2024 and 2025 show, much has been accomplished but considerably more policy and program development are needed to accomplish the goal of affordable, accessible, high quality, inclusive early learning and child care for all.

In the coming five years, it will be important that CWELCC program continues and is strengthened to protect the many gains made.



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